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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON LAW ON
RELIGION IN KYRGYZSTAN

¶1. Post is authorized to make the following statement at the January 22, 2009, meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna:

Begin Text:

Madam Chairwoman,

The United States expresses its regret that Kyrgyz President Bakiyev on January 12 signed a decree promulgating a restrictive law on religion that we believe is inconsistent with several of Kyrgyzstan's OSCE commitments on freedom of belief and assembly. This is the third time the United States has conveyed to the Permanent Council its concern about this law.

As reported by ODIHR's Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief, provisions in the law impose burdensome constraints and barriers to registration, including a prohibitively high required minimum number of members to officially register a religious organization. The provisions also restrict freedom of expression, including the dissemination of religious material. Other provisions in the new law are vague, and could invite confusion and variations in its interpretation and application by authorities.

While the stated intention of the law to combat violence associated with religious extremism may be worthwhile, the United States believes that the law could result in diminished religious freedom and tolerance in the Kyrgyz Republic. We view the adoption of this law as a step backward in a country that has come so far.

We hope the Kyrgyz mission to the OSCE will relay these concerns to authorities in Bishkek, and ask President Bakiyev to consider asking Parliament to repeal the law.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

End text.
BURNS